

**Re: S.B. No. 942 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING EDUCATION. (ED) – VOTE NO ON THIS BILL**

Dear Education Committee:

**My name is Matthew Westerby, and I urge you to do all you can to protect the education funding that exists for Interdistrict programming and neither diminish or eliminate services that are much needed.**

I am the artistic director of Matthew Westerby Company, a New York City-based modern dance company specializing in professional performance and arts-in-education initiatives. I have worked as a dancer with many companies in the US, UK and Europe, as well as teaching master-classes in dance around the world for international dance festivals, universities, public school systems, dance companies and community organizations. As a freelance choreographer, I have been commissioned to choreograph work for the Dancewave Companies, the Dance Department at Naugatuck Valley Community College, the Evolve Dance Company, Brass City Ballet, Covenant Ballet Theatre of Brooklyn, Silesian Dance Theatre (Poland) and Laban (UK). Matthew Westerby Company has presented numerous sold-out seasons in New York City, as well as being presented throughout the tri-state area to critical acclaim.

My company has been the dance company in residence for *Project Poetry Live!* in partnership with Litchfield Performing Arts for the past six seasons. Having worked closely with Vita Muir, the project founder, for the past six years, I feel I am highly knowledgeable and experienced with the project and that I am qualified to speak about its unrivalled success in arts provision for public school children throughout the state of Connecticut.

I believe that *Project Poetry Live!* has always been groundbreaking in its ability to utilize the arts as a vehicle for bringing children from different communities, backgrounds and ethnicities together to share a deeply valuable common experience. I have witnessed the transformation of groups of youths who have developed – academically, artistically and socially – through their participation in workshops, rehearsals and performances in dance, music, poetry and art. The project has opened many doors of opportunity for its participants and has brought together families and communities in decisive and impactful ways that foster not only an understanding of the arts, but an understanding of the true nature of community itself.

Most importantly, *Project Poetry Live!* has provided its participants with invaluable sharing of knowledge and experience of others – they have not only acquired the skills and knowledge to understand multiculturalism, but have learned to develop very positive attitudes towards it.

If *Project Poetry Live!* is to either lose or receive diminished funding as part of cuts to the state budget (the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant, from the State Department of Education), the people and communities of Connecticut would lose a vital part of its arts and educational programming. The public school populations of Hartford, Waterbury, Thomaston, Watertown and beyond would no longer have the knowledge and understanding of the communities that lie in the surrounding areas, not able to fully appreciate the richly diverse cultures that lie just beyond the borders of their own county. By supporting *Project Poetry Live!* the state of Connecticut is showing its understanding of the need for multicultural educational opportunities and the exemplary efforts of Litchfield Performing Arts and its associates to encourage integration for all. **Please do all you can to ensure *Project Poetry Live!* continues to bring children of all ethnicities and economic backgrounds together to develop positive and lasting bonds throughout our communities.** Please vote no on bill S.B. No. 942. Thank you.

Sincerely,

**Matthew Westerby**

Artistic Director, Matthew Westerby Company

Program Director, *Project Poetry Live!*, Litchfield Performing Arts